

Jewish art enters golden age

By DIANNE KAYE LAW

"We are in the beginning of the golden age of Jewish visual art and painting," said Lawrence Fleischman, who told his audience Sunday night, Feb. 22, in Shurey Zedek synagogue in Southfield.

Fleischman, director of the Kennedy Gallery in New York and a former member of the Shurey Zedek congregation, presented a slide lecture on "Jewish Art in America," which highlighted the congregation's celebration of "The Bicentennial and the Jewish Experience."

The three-day bicentennial event was sponsored by the Shurey Zedek cultural commission's fine arts division.

IN HIS PRESENTATION, Fleischman used the works of prominent Jewish artists such as Meyer Meier, Ben Shahn, Leonard Baskin and Jack Levine to illustrate his belief that subject matter rather than style distinguishes Jewish art from other types.

Jewish artists draw from their cultural heritage in their works, he explained. "They explore the Old Testament, their environment and show their concern with man's injustice to man." It is interesting how many Jewish artists once studied in the rabbi's.

Religion and background influence art "more than people realize," according to Fleischman.

Fleischman's credentials as an art expert and collector are impressive. His interest in art began early. As a child, he was fascinated by photography. From photography, my interest in art developed and constantly grew," he recalled.

EVERY TIME I see an artist break with his traditional background, he art becomes superficial," he added.

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AT 13, he began collecting art, acquiring Picasso and Matisse lithographs.

In the late 1940s, he became the leading collector of American art. In 1954, he sold his collection of American art, afforded him an opportunity to tour his collection and lecture overseas on behalf of the United States government.

As a member of the White House Committee for the Fine Arts under Mrs. John

Widener, he was involved in the selection of paintings for Mrs. Kennedy's project of restoring the White House. He continued to work on the White House committee during the Johnson administration.

WHILE SERVING on the board of directors of the Detroit Institute of Arts (1962-65), Fleischman assisted the institute in procuring its first Rubens and supervised the institute's first wing.

Frustrated by the lack of information available on American artists, Fleischman and art institute director Edgar P. Richardson founded the Archives of American Art.

The archives now hold more than

3,000,000 reference items on the history of American painting and sculpture.

President of the institute for 14 years, Fleischman was also president of Detroit Arts Commission and treasurer of the Art School Society of Arts and Crafts (now Center for Creative Studies) in Detroit for 10 years.

He is a member of the board of the Kestner Galleries in New York. This decision to be a full-time art dealer forced Fleischman to sell his American masters collection, feeling that it wasn't fair to compete with his customers. He now concentrates on collecting antiques and old European masters.

Summing up his work as a professional art dealer, he said: "My greatest thrill now comes from finding great American works and placing them."

Following Fleischman's lecture, guests gathered in Shurey Zedek's Morris Adler Hall for a reception in his honor.

THE BICENTENNIAL and the Jewish Experience featured a display of Jewish

artworks.

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